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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the intricacies of the "Who's Who" publishing enterprise to try to understand its purposes and its appeal. Surveyed were all the organizations and publishers claiming to render recognition services for high school students. The purpose in soliciting information was to develop some guidelines which would be helpful to high school principals and their students in evaluating their participation. The information obtained was used to present a program-by-program review and to point up the problems and pitfalls for principals and students in participating in such programs. The report concludes with a set of guidelines which are suggested to help protect students and schools from the abuses common in the various recognition programs for high school students. (SJL)

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What's What with Who's Who?

A Report on Recognition Programs for Students

Gilbert R. Weldy

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Foreword

Caveat emptor! The Roman buyers who were admonished to beware, for the most part, were dealing with merchandise or services which were readily identifiable. This is not the case when alleged honors are being bestowed or the elusive ingredient of vanity is being merchandised. As author Gilbert Weldy points out, the human craving for recognition and self-esteem tends to lower one's sales resistance in *honoris causa.* If the student remains unimpressed with his new honorary status, his family most assuredly wants to tell the world about his merited selection. Many legitimate questions are being raised as to the value, if any, of this type of recognition. As a part of NASSP's service role in assisting student bodies, faculties, school administrators, and parents, the basic issues are explored in this timely monograph.

The Association has no desire to interfere with the nation's free enterprise system, and a profit motive on the part of any of the vendors is not a factor in this study. Our only interest is to point out what appear to be evidences of acceptable standards in the who's who field, and prevent exploitation of students where standards are conspicuous by their absence. We are grateful for Dr. Weldy's contribution to this important subject, and to most of the publishers who cooperated fully with his efforts to present a fair and factual picture of the industry.

Owen B. Kiernan
Executive Secretary

Introduction

FLATTERY WILL GET you somewhere. In spite of the dubious reputations of some unscrupulous "vanity publishers"[1] and the frequent advisories and warnings from Better Business Bureaus, consumer protection groups, and the NASSP, "who's who type" publications describing high school students are flourishing, and several actually appear to be gaining in status and profitability.

The original *Who's Who* publication has enjoyed a clear and unblemished reputation as a library reference work since Albert Nelson Marquis started publishing short biographies of noteworthy Americans in 1898. Used as reference books in most libraries, they provide personal and professional data about prominent, successful, and influential persons.

The 1974-1975 edition of *Who's Who in America* specifies one selection criterion—*reference value*—"by virtue of positions achieved through election or appointment to office and by distinguished achievement in meritorious careers." To be listed in *Who's Who* was, and still is, a legitimate mark of distinction. It was a tribute that many prominent people listed among their "credits."

Marquis has had a multitude of imitators who have not only borrowed his idea, but also his format, his mystique, and even his nomenclature. Marquis obviously never protected the title of *Who's Who* through trademark or copyright laws. The publishers of who's who type volumes have proliferated to a point where almost anyone with a bit of effort can get his/her biography published in somebody's book.

The publishers have invaded the high school student market with a vengeance. A high school student can be "recognized" for achievement in scholarship, athletics, publications, community service, or cheerleading. Such recognition for high school students has been the subject of considerable controversy since the first books appeared about 10 years ago. They have been viewed with skepticism by school principals as outright attempts to exploit the

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[1]An expression in the publishing trade that describes those who publish books at the author's expense or publish limited edition biographies, the cost of which is borne almost totally by those whose names are listed and/or their families.

vanity of impressionable students. At the same time they have been accepted and relished by some students and their parents (not to mention grandparents) who value this recognition and pursue it.

At their *worst*, some who's who publishers have been unscrupulous charlatans who have violated every business ethic, who have sold books and never delivered, who have borrowed on others' legitimate reputations, and who have had a shadowy existence and then mysteriously disappeared. Some used office addresses that proved to be mail drops for their purloined profits.

At their *best*, who's who publishers are legitimate, shrewd businessmen carefully capitalizing on the human need for recognition and self-esteem. Their business methods are usually sound; their appeals are tested and successful; they produce what they advertise; they satisfy complaints; and they make a profit.

Because there have been such extremes in the experiences that schools have had with these ventures, principals have been faced with a dilemma. They have questioned the value of such recognition and have usually chosen not to submit names to the publishers as recommended by NASSP. At the same time, some students and their parents impressed by the "Who's Who" or "Outstanding Teenager" designation see no reason this recognition should not be facilitated through the school.

This debate over the merits of who's who listings for high school students has been vigorous for several years. The sides have been taken: the who's who publishers vs. the NASSP, its Contests and Activities Committee, and some of the consumer protection groups. The NASSP committee has been solicited repeatedly to recognize and legitimize these publications by placing them on its annual advisory listing of National Contests and Activities. Representatives of these recognition programs have appeared before the committee to plead their case. Inclusion on this prestigious list of contests and activities would have been an immediate leap into respectability for who's who publications and would have brought 100 percent cooperation of school principals across the country.

Some publishers have moved toward compliance with the criteria used by the Contests and Activities Committee in order to be placed on its advisory list. Some publishers have revised communication with schools, honed up selection criteria, removed objectionable sales pitches, and have even changed (when ordered by a court) the names of their programs.

NASSP's Contests and Activities Committee has also made some modifications, changing the wording in its title from an "approved list" to an "advisory list," to avoid accusations of restraint of trade by sponsors of the "unapproved" student activities.

The committee also reviewed its practice of including scholarship programs on the advisory list when the who's who publishers set up foundations and offered scholarships to the selectees. Scholarship programs such as the National Merit and NASSP's own National Honor Society were dropped from the advisory list. In addition, the publishers were given permission to use in their literature a statement as follows: "The Contests and Activities Committee of the National Association of Secondary School Principals has determined that scholarship programs need not have their approval and will not in the future be included on their advisory list of contests and activities."

The committee's position on who's who type publications was set forth in the Advisory List of Activities beginning in 1973–1974. The statement is:

> The Committee has not listed who's who type publications or recognition programs which claim to honor outstanding students and often, in turn, offer certificates, pins, or publications to the students. The Committee's reasons include:
>
> 1. The recognition itself is inherently of questionable value and is likely not to serve any ultimate educational benefit.
> 2. The methods used for gathering names for recognition have questionable validity in terms of whether students selected actually deserve recognition. There is ample evidence that students are usually listed or recognized if they furnish biographical information to the sponsor.
> 3. Most of the organizations known to the Committee are profit motivated and have no association with educational, philanthropic, or professional associations.
> 4. The programs often solicit students and their families to purchase the publication, certificate, or pin.
> 5. The publications produced provide convenient lists of students' names and addresses that can be used for non-educational purposes.
> 6. Some promoters and publishers, using deceptively reputable names or titles, list advisers or directors who may or may not have any responsibility for the enterprise.

Of even longer standing is NASSP's position on requests for students' names. The following resolution, passed unanimously at the Association's annual convention in 1959 and reaffirmed in 1964, sets the position:

> Whereas, schools are receiving a large number of requests and appeals from many sources, under the guise of an educational service, for lists of students and personal information about them,
> And whereas, these lists are often duplicated and printed and made available to persons, agencies, and organizations,
> And whereas, students in secondary schools can be a captive group for all kinds of exploitation and questionable solicitation, since the list, when released, implies endorsement of the principal or the school,
> And whereas, such lists, if made available to anyone, are subject to other questionable distribution,
> And whereas, the school has a moral obligation to students and their parents to regard such information as personal and confidential and to afford all possible security against exploitation and solicitation,
> Therefore, be it resolved that principals, school administrators, and staff members refrain from issuing all such lists and personal information about students.

There is little likelihood that this position on distributing students' names will be retracted in the light of recent legislation requiring the protection of confidentiality of students' school records.

Pronouncements by NASSP and warnings by Better Business Bureaus and the Educational Products Information Exchange Institute[1] have not deterred or significantly impeded the who's who publishing business. Those that have gone under or suddenly disappeared have apparently succumbed to the more dominant, aggressive competitors in the field or have just failed through their own ineptitude.

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[1] A "non-profit, consumer supported, unbiased" institute.

Method of This Study

FOR SOME TIME, principals have expressed a need to delve even deeper into the intricacies of the who's who publishing enterprise and to try to understand its purposes and its appeal. It seemed the place to start was to survey all the organizations and publishers claiming to render recognition services for high school students in order to learn their *modus operandi* and understand their motivation.

A cover letter[1] assured the organizations that the purpose in soliciting information was to "develop some guidelines which would be helpful to high school principals and their students in evaluating their participation." The letter expressed that the intent was not to prejudge any program or to use this means to condemn or criticize, but rather to write a fair and objective review of these programs and to point up the problems and pitfalls for principals and students in participating in such programs.

With the letter was a comprehensive questionnaire asking for information about every aspect of the program, including:

- Purposes of the program
- Exact nature of the recognition offered to students
- Criteria for selection of students
- Method of selection of students
- Number of students selected annually
- Use made of the names of students
- Profit or non-profit motive of the company
- Types of awards and publications offered for sale to students
- Requirements of fees or purchases
- When in selection process purchases are made
- Who is solicited for purchases of awards
- The cost of awards
- Availability of publications to libraries and schools
- History of organization
- Scholarships associated with program or publication.

Also requested for examination were copies of recognition publications, other awards, and all letters and communications which were used with students and/or schools.

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[1]The survey was conducted in April 1975.

Summary of Partial Responses, Non-Responses

THE ORGANIZATIONS AND publishers used in the survey came from the author's extensive files, from NASSP, and from the publishers themselves. Interestingly, many of the inquiries were returned marked "addressee unknown." This was significant in that all these organizations were at that time offering services to high school students and for unknown reasons had moved on or gone out of business. A telephone inquiry and a check with local Better Business Bureaus followed up all of the non-respondents:

Who's Who in High School-Honor Society (New Orleans). The survey was returned indicating the box number was incorrect. The New Orleans Better Business Bureau in August 1975, reported that it received numerous complaints from all over the United States about this organization. Postal authorities intervened and stopped its mail which put the firm out of business.

The Better Business Bureau file, dating back to 1970, disclosed numerous unanswered and unadjusted complaints. The Bureau characterized the letter of invitation to the society as a "beguiling tactic, playing upon a youth's ego and vanity." The Bureau recounted lengthy delays in the delivery of the recognition book and described apologetic letters containing such excuses as mechanical failures at the bindery or problems with the mailing service. The Bureau's report concluded, "Students may or may not get their paid-for book, but they do have our sympathy for falling prey to such a vanity promotion!"

Who's Who Among High School Seniors (Baton Rouge, La.). The survey was apparently delivered, but there was no response. No telephone number is listed in Baton Rouge.

The Better Business Bureau of Baton Rouge reported that Professional Achievements, Inc., is the name of the business that awards (sells) a "Who's Who Among High School Seniors" certificate to young people throughout the country. The company also

offers certificates for "Who's Who Among Catholic High School Seniors" and "Who's Who Among Fraternities and Sororities."

The Better Business Bureau in 1973 learned from the organization's president and sole proprietor, Wilbur D. Nesbit, that his purpose was to provide "recognition of outstanding students." The fee for the certificate included handling costs and also went toward the organization's "Foundation" scholarship fund.

At the close of the 1973 school year, Professional Achievements, Inc., awarded 10 scholarships, in the amount of $250 each. The awards were verified by the Bureau. Its file in February 1974, showed no problems of consequence, but expressed the opinion that the company's operation had certain earmarks of a "Vanity Promotion."

The Society of Distinguished American High School Students (Birmingham, Ala.).

The first request was not returned. A telephone call located E. Vinson Givens, administrator, who indicated that he *is* publishing a recognition book. He was told of the survey and was requested to give prompt attention to another that would be put in the mail. No response came back.

E. Vinson Givens refused to grant permission for the author's using information which was furnished by a member of his organization in answer to a separate inquiry in January 1974. E. Vinson Givens in his response of August 1975, said that the information would be out of date and that, not knowing the purpose of the research, "respectfully refused" to furnish information concerning the Society and refused to give permission to this writer to quote from the group's literature.

One item that was out of date was the name of the Society. Sometime after January 1974, and before summer, 1975, the name was changed from Society of Outstanding American High School Students to Society of "Distinguished American High School Students." This change was forced by another organization which had a trademark on the term "Outstanding" in its publication of biographical works.

According to the Better Business Bureau of Birmingham, the Society was established in 1968 and incorporated as a non-profit organization in Alabama in 1969. The company compiles and sells a biographical directory of high school students, according to the Better Business Bureau; and although there is no obligation to purchase the book, parents are solicited and offered a "Grand Edition"

of the book for $19.50 plus 75 cents for mailing and handling. The Better Business Bureau received a copy of the publication which listed 18,000 names in alphabetical order. The Better Business Bureau says the company has a good record of adjusting complaints.

One unusual feature of the Society's program is its claim to conduct and co-sponsor a scholarship program with awards in the current year amounting to $1,000,000. The Society lists 40 participating colleges who, according to Society literature, reserve 190 $1,000 renewable scholarships for members of the Society.

These scholarships are reserved for members of the Society in exchange for lists of students who have expressed interest in a particular college or are in a group that fits criteria requested by the college. According to several of the admissions and financial aid officers of the participating colleges, the Society is providing a service to their recruitment programs at no charge to the colleges. Students who receive aid must meet all of the admissions-and-need criteria of the college granting the scholarship.

Colleges renew their grants and report each year the amounts provided members of the Society. The sum advertised as "available" ($1,000,000) each year then represents the total new and renewed scholarships provided by the 40 colleges using the Society's services. Two of the colleges contacted in this study have recently asked to be dropped from the list of "participating" colleges.

The Society has also made some nominal unrestricted honor awards on merit alone. In 1972-1973, the Society awarded four scholarships totalling $2,000.

At the request of principals in Alabama, NASSP made inquiries about the Society in the fall of 1974. Particularly, principals were suspicious of the scholarships "funded" at the enormous sum of $800,000. (An explanation of this computing appears above.) A Society representative met with officials from the Alabama Attorney General's office to discuss the misleading advertisements and the late arrival of purchased books. The attorney general referred the Society to the State Department of Revenue for a review of its nonprofit status. Quentin Brown, reporting for the Birmingham office of the Attorney General, described the counsel for the Society as cooperative and anxious to satisfy the complaints of the Alabama principals.

The Society was still aggressively soliciting names through the fall of 1975. As a principal, this writer received the first request on

September 22, a follow-up "memo" on October 17, another more urgent plea on November 14, and a final "notice" (large print in a black panel) in December. The November mailing contained a special question-and-answer sheet which addressed five questions very similar to those raised in this study. All of the mailings carried the signature of E. Vinson Givens, "administrator."

The Society literature invites principals to nominate students for their eighth annual "National Honors and Awards Program." The supplemental information sheet proclaims the Society to be "The Nation's Leading High School Honorary," and states its intent for membership to be "the highest honor a high school student can obtain." The literature describes the National Awards Program, explaining meticulously that the $3,000,000 awarded to members since 1968 is "completely funded by the participating colleges" and not by the Society.

Who's Who Among American Student Leaders (Los Angeles, Calif.). No response was received. No telephone for this organization is listed in Los Angeles. The Better Business Bureau of Los Angeles reported that its files reveal "many unanswered complaints" on this organization and that it has ceased to process complaints as not in the public interest. The Bureau advised that complaints should be forwarded to the office of the Postal Inspector in Los Angeles. This writer's letter of October 9, 1975, to the Inspector remains unanswered.

Who's Who in National High School Football (Pueblo, Colo.). No response. No telephone listed in Pueblo.

Who's Who Among Student Leaders of America (Mesa, Ariz.). No response. No telephone listed in Mesa. "Help-Mate," a feature of the *Chicago Sun Times* on consumer problems, reported in 1973 that this organization had gone out of business in 1973. The Better Business Bureau of Maricopa County had no information on this organization.

Who's Who in National High School Athletics (Washington, D.C.). The survey was returned "addressee unknown." There is no telephone listing in Washington, D.C.

The Better Business Bureau of Washington, D.C., reports that this organization operates from the office of Josep Communications in Denver, Colo. They have used a Washington address since

1974, but it is an answering service that receives messages and forwards mail.

The firm specializes "in publishing national yearbooks concerned with youth of high school age." *Who's Who in National High School Athletics* has been published for the past two years, with the purpose of providing recognition for achievement in high school football. The publication is sold for $14.95.

A second publication, *National Panorama of American Youth*, is scheduled for publication but had not appeared as of March 1975. It will "honor high school seniors nationwide."

The District of Columbia Bureau has received inquiries but no complaints. Its report is "not to be considered as either a recommendation or deprecation of the company, its products or its services, but the information is provided to assist persons in making their decisions."

In an article in the Washington *Post*, Patrick Frazier reported that *Who's Who in National High School Athletics* after two editions "suffocated from the competition." A publication *was* produced in paperback in 1973-1974 with "biographies" of thousands of high school coaches and players. With pictures of many included, the book claims to be "America's vanguard of Athletic recognition." A "Distinguished National Advisory Board" made up of well-known, prominent coaches and athletes is pictured with each one's success story in detail.

National Honorary Society-Order of Lambda (Pittsburgh, Pa.). No response. No telephone listed in Pittsburgh. According to an NASSP advisory, letters from this organization were sent directly to student council presidents requesting names of five or 10 students whom they might honor, free of the "prejudice of faculty members." Home addresses were requested and indications were that such information would be sold to commercial sources. Students were charged a $12 initiation fee. NASSP pointed out that this group had no connection with the Association's own prestigious National Honor Society.

Educational Services, Inc. Who's Who in American High Schools (Atlanta, Ga.). Survey was returned to the sender, "no such number." There is no phone listing in Atlanta. Names of these organizations are so similar as to be very confusing, but the *Epiegram* of February 15, 1975, described this program as having explicit selection criteria, including endorsement by a faculty member, but it charged $10 to each student for a "publication fee."

Distinguished Young Americans Foundation (Richmond, Va.). Survey returned. No telephone is listed in Richmond. The Better Business Bureau of Richmond, Va., did not have any report available on this organization.

The National Society of Student Leaders (Washington, D.C.). Survey returned. No telephone listed in Washington, D.C.

This Society was soliciting names of students as recently as 1972–1973. Letters were addressed to guidance counselors who were invited to submit names of not more than 10 percent of the sophomore, junior, and senior class students. Selected students were immediately to become members of the National Society of Student Leaders and were to be included in the biographical volume. No one, the letter said, would receive pressure to buy the book.

Five one-time scholarships of from $500 to $1,000 were offered to the Society's members, based on competition in "achievement test scores and leadership contributions."

NASSP staff members visited the Society's Washington address in March of 1973 and found it to be the duplicating shop for the building. A person in charge seemed to know of the Society's existence and promised to have Lowell Reed, the executive director, call. He never did. The Better Business Bureau of Washington, D.C., reported that it has sent repeated requests to this organization for background information but has received no response.

American Education Foundation (Hollywood, Calif.). Survey undeliverable as addressed. This organization, claiming to "serve the purpose of education," sought to make awards to a nationwide selection of students. Its letter expressed the belief that many scholarship programs require excessive financial data from parents, constituting an invasion of privacy, and not essential to determining the students' merits. The Foundation intended to award grants based on an evaluation of the student's moral character, ideals, and potential rather than on financial need and grade point average. In 1974, the Foundation announced awards totalling $10,000. Applications were required to include a $5 "processing fee."

Sinclair S. Sinclair, executive director, called the foundation a "clearing house for major corporations" in administering scholarships.

Letters mailed to the American Education Foundation in June of 1975 were returned to the senders pursuant to a Federal Court Order issued at Los Angeles on May 15, 1975. The postal inspector

in Los Angeles notified correspondents that the promoter of the American Education Foundation, Ernest S. Sinclair, alias Dr. Sinclair S. Sinclair, was arrested on April 16, 1974, and charged with violation of the Federal Mail Fraud Statute. He was sentenced to three years in a federal prison.

Prep All Americans (Montgomery, Ala.). The publisher of *Coach and Athlete* magazine also publishes separate yearbooks for high school athletes in basketball, football, and track. Such books in fact are published, according to the National Federation of High School Associations, although the organization has not as yet responded to the writer's survey.

American Student List Company (Greatneck, N.Y.). This organization collects student names. They have not responded to the survey. The author called and spoke briefly with a representative of this organization, told him of the study, and requested his cooperation. He was suspicious, however, and terminated the call rather abruptly.

A couple of others said their organizations did not engage in the activities described and, therefore, the questions were not applicable to them. This group included:

The International Cheerleading Foundation (Shawnee Mission, Kan.). Randy Neil, executive director of the Foundation, said that his organization does not conduct any project that seeks names of high school students for use in any sort of recognition program. There was a time when the Colgate-Palmolive Company requested that he undertake such a recognition program but "because we found same to be contrary to your NASSP Committee's recommendations we quickly ceased any preparations for such a thing."

Forum of Distinguished Americans (Washington, D.C.). David R. Willmon, responding for the Forum, reported "that due to lack of interest and participation, this program has been discontinued." The program was still mailing invitations to schools in January 1973. The Washington, D.C. Better Business Bureau reported that this organization repeatedly failed to respond to inquiries for background information.

Summary of Complete Responses

FULL, FRANK, AND helpful responses came from only the following:

- The Cum Laude Society
- National Beta Club
- National High School Award for Excellence
- National Honor Society
- Outstanding Teenagers of America
- Who's Who Among American High School Students

The Cum Laude Society

The Cum Laude Society founded in 1906 by Dr. Abram W. Harris of the Tome School, Port Deposit, Md., is modeled after the Phi Beta Kappa. The purpose is "to promote learning and sound scholarship in secondary schools." Schools may select up to 20 percent of a graduating class for membership. Individual chapters, both faculty and students or faculty alone, set the criteria which must recognize outstanding scholarship.

A not-for-profit organization, Cum Laude Society provides pins and certificates for its members, purchased for them by the chapters. There are 250 chapters in both public and private schools, with the great majority being private schools.

The Society publishes no directory nor does it offer any awards or certificates for sale directly to members. There is a triennial meeting, held until recently in eastern cities where most chapters are concentrated.

The Society has not sought nor has it ever been included in NASSP's *Advisory List of Contests and Activities.*

National Beta Club

The National Beta Club was chartered as a non-profit "eleemosynary-educational organization" under the laws of South Carolina in 1936. Its stated purpose is "to reward merit, encourage effort, and elevate the moral welfare of high school students."

In May of 1974, there were 2,776 senior chapters of the Beta Club in 21 states with a membership of 104,388. During 1973–1974, 100 new clubs were instituted. A Junior Beta Club, established in 1961

now has 1,381 clubs located in 19 states. In 1974–1975, 165 new junior centers were chartered.

A student selected for membership must have the endorsement of the school's "approved head" and a membership certificate requested by that person. Membership is based upon "honorable character, good mentality, creditable achievement, commendable attitude." Membership is not limited to any percent of class or high school enrollment.

Cost of membership for senior Beta Club members is $7 and $4 for junior members. For this fee members receive a certificate of membership, an official membership pin, a copy of the *Beta Club Journal*, and a gold seal for his/her diploma. Also, as a service to members the Beta Club publishes a *College Fact Chart*, a 64-page brochure giving the essential information about all colleges and universities in the U.S.A. It is available to anyone for $1.

The high school senior survey, which gathered data about students (address, age, sex, religious affiliation, father's initials and occupation, vocational interest, college preference, and activities participation), has been discontinued according to J. W. Harris, executive secretary of Beta Club. The most recent senior survey was conducted in 1974 and was distributed only to Departments of Education and "Approved Educational Institutions." According to Beta Club literature, the lists were never disseminated to "non-educational or business agencies, organizations, or individuals for financial or any other considerations."

State conventions are held annually for senior members only. Activities at the two-day conventions include a talent contest, forum discussions, student-led conferences, election of officers, and a dance. In 1973–1974, 27,621 students attended the state conventions.

The Beta Club has not in recent years sought, and has never been included in NASSP's *Advisory List of Contests and Activities*.

The National Honor Society

The National Honor Society and the National Junior Honor Society are a major activity of the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Founded in the early 1920s, they have as their purposes: "to create an enthusiasm for scholarship, to stimulate a desire to render service, to promote worthy leadership, and to encourage the development of character."

Chapters are currently active in 21,000 secondary schools in all 50 states and enroll approximately 450,000 members. Selection is

by faculty members and must be based on scholarship (B average or better), leadership, service, and character. Members of the Society have distinguished themselves through the years in every walk of life. One such member is President Gerald R. Ford.

Each chapter must be approved by the national office, which receives a $25 fee at the time the charter is granted. No additional fees are paid by individuals or by chapters to the national office. Chapters may establish dues for their own members.

The national organization keeps annual reports of membership from each chapter, but lists are never furnished to any other agency.

The National Honor Society is a non-profit agency which derives its income from the sale of membership emblems (pins, jewelry, gavels, plaques, felt banners, etc.), membership cards, and certificates. Supply items are sold only to schools, not to individuals.

The Society is advised by the National Council, a rotating committee of secondary school principals, subject to the final approval of the NASSP Board of Directors.

National Honor Society members are eligible to compete for scholarships which currently number 225 annually with a value of $1,000 each. Since 1945 the National Honor Society has awarded $2,345,000 in scholarships to high school senior members. Funds for the scholarships come from revenue produced by the sale of supply items and contributions by private businesses.

The National Honor Society scholarship program was listed by NASSP in its *Advisory List of Contests and Activities* until 1973, when the committee dropped scholarship competitions from the listing.

National High School Award for Excellence

The National High School Award for Excellence does not appear to be an organization for high school students. It was organized as a "profit institution" in 1967 "to provide a means whereby our member schools can honor those students who have attained a high degree of success in both scholastic activities as well as meritorious service to their community at large." The recognition offered members is a certificate, provided free, and a pin which can be purchased for $4. Students are not obligated to purchase the pin, which is sent to the school to be presented at an appropriate award ceremony.

The recognition, used by schools in all 50 states, according to the National High School Award for Excellence brochure, is based upon "significant attainment in both scholastic and extra-curricular activities." The activities must include "social contributions" to the community at large. No award is considered for any student "who has attained less than eighty-five." (The literature does not explain 85 what). Students are selected locally with the right reserved nationally to make final resolution on any selection "deemed unworthy of recognition." The only information requested is the nomination of the school, the approximate scholastic average, and whether or not the student wishes the award pin.

A Committee on Eligibility, made up of active members of the teaching profession with an average of at least 10 years experience, formulates the guidelines for the award program.

In the fall of 1974, when Ivan Gluckman, counsel for NASSP, called John Gibbon, president of the group, to point out the close similarity between the letterhead logos of the National High School Award for Excellence and the National Honor Society, he responded by assuring the NASSP that there was no intention to confuse their award program with that of any other organization and promised to take immediate steps to revise their letterhead.

The organization has not sought and has never been included in the Advisory List of NASSP's Contests and Activities Committee. Their program, according to their literature, is in no way affiliated with any other organization or association.

Outstanding Teenagers of America

Outstanding Teenagers of America is one of seven Outstanding Americans[1] programs. It is a division of Fuller and Dees Marketing Group, Inc., which is a subsidiary of the Times Mirror Corporation, one of the largest publishers in the world and highly respected in the industry. The company is, of course, organized for profit, although the Teenagers segment is alleged to have a deficit this year.

S. S. Nettles, director for the Outstanding Americans program, reported in August 1975, that a decision had been made not to continue the Teenagers publication for the year 1976. He indicated that if high school principals would work closely with their or-

[1]Young Men, Young Women, College Athletes, Elementary Teachers, Teenagers, Secondary Educators, Educators.

ganization as advisers to make the program worthwhile that they may start the program again in 1977.

The program's purpose is "to honor and recognize, on a local and national level, teenagers who have made significant contributions to their schools and communities." An awards volume, listing all selected teenagers, has been published annually for the past 10 years.

Students are selected by their schools on the basis of "community service and leadership, scholarship, service to school, and participation in extra-curricular activities or sports." According to Nettles, no young person can be named an Outstanding Teenager of America unless the principal nominates the student. Without full cooperation and participation of high school principals, this program cannot function.[1]

Approximately 12,000 to 14,000 students are selected for the awards volume. From students in each state a state winner is selected. The 50 individuals are awarded trophies, and from them the O.T.A. Board of Advisers selects 10 regional winners who receive $500 scholarships and two national winners who receive $1,000 scholarships.

In addition to the annual awards volume, which is offered to the Outstanding Teenagers at the time they submit biographical information, the students can purchase a "Deluxe Wall Plaque" or a marble paperweight. Information which is furnished by the teenager includes name, sex, address, school, names of father/mother, paternal and maternal grandparents and their addresses, high school activities, community activities, awards and honors. O.T.A. also requests names of two local newspapers, and publicity releases concerning the outstanding teenagers' selection are sent to local papers.

There is no requirement for the student or his family to make any purchases, but all, including grandparents, are given the opportunity to purchase the awards volume or mementoes.

Names of outstanding teenagers are used only for the O.T.A. program during the current year. No other agency or institution is furnished names, addresses or biographical information. The awards volume is copyrighted to prohibit any other organization from extracting and reproducing this information.

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[1]Letter from S.S. Nettles to the author, April 30, 1975.

The awards volume is made available to school and public libraries, but sales to libraries have been minimal. A list of libraries that have purchased the volume is not available.

The Outstanding Teenagers of America program has trademarked the term "Outstanding" which for the purposes of publishing biographical works is their sole property. An "important notice" preceding the preface indicates that "the sale of this biographical compilation and/or its use is intended solely as a reference work and/or for scholarly pursuits. The use of names and addresses by the publishers of other biographical works . . . is beyond the use intended for this work and such use will result in legal action by the publisher."

The Better Business Bureau of Metropolitan Washington, D.C., reports that they have received many inquiries on the O.T.A. program but have received no consumer complaints. They report that the company has been cooperative in supplying information to their office. The O.T.A. has not sought listing with the NASSP *Contests and Activities Advisory List.*

Who's Who Among American High School Students[1]

Published by Educational Communications, Inc. (ECI), with headquarters in Northbrook, Ill., this publication describes itself as "the largest and leading student achievement book series in this nation." Under threat of possible litigation, the company name was changed in 1973 from Merit's *Who's Who Among American High School Students* (Merit Publishing Co.) because of the confusion with the National Merit Scholarship Corporation.

All students selected for recognition who complete and return their biographical forms are featured in the publication, pending final editing. Educational Communications, Inc., which is organized for profit, attempts "to recognize students who have demonstrated leadership in either academics, athletics, extra-curricular activities or community service." Its brochure advises: "Rigid and inflexible guidelines are not desirable since standards and criteria vary from region-to-region and school-to-school in the same states."

All public and private high schools in the country are invited to recommend students; and, according to Paul Krouse, publisher, "several thousand" participate. Students are also recommended by churches of all denominations who have organized youth pro-

[1]Hereafter referred to simply as Educational Communication's *Who's Who.*

grams, scholarship organizations, civic and service groups, educational associations, and youth program sponsors at national and local levels. Approximately 30,000 institutions and organizations are invited to submit names.

Educational Communications, Inc. takes precautions to ensure that students selected deserve the recognition. An editing and screening process ascertains each student's qualifications. In addition, ECI now employs an independent firm of certified public accountants to conduct an audit of biographical material submitted by students to determine accuracy and authenticity. If an unacceptable rate of erroneous material is found, the publisher states that corrective measures will be taken. ECI's independent auditor, Checkers, Simon, and Rosner of Chicago, determined in 1975 that, according to their criteria (explained in their report), the information furnished by students was 97.22 percent "substantially accurate."

Student biographies in ECI's *Who's Who* are, as in O.T.A., lists of school activities, much like yearbook senior activities. They are heavily abbreviated, but do not include home addresses, nor parents' or grandparents' names. They do include college choices and career preferences.

In addition to the biographies, ECI publishes pictures of students who wish them. A $3 processing fee is required for those who are not purchasing the book, or the $3 is added to the cost if the student does purchase it. Each of the four volumes contains over 15,000 pictures of the biographees, 42 to each page. They all appear to be the typical school yearbook senior portraits or individual underclass pictures.

Students are given the opportunity to purchase the volume in which their biography appears at the time they submit their biographical data. The cost for the 1973–1974 volume was $16.95 or $19.95 with picture. In addition, a bronze plaque with name engraved for $11.95, an award key in gold or silver for $7.95, a ceramic stein/mug for $8.95 and a certificate of merit for $1.95 were available.

No purchases of any kind are required for a student to be listed. *Who's Who* literature repeatedly makes this condition clear. In addition to the information provided for publication, students also report home address and address of their high school, their year in school, class rank, and grade average. They also may indicate their interest in applying for ECI's Foundation scholarships. They may also authorize publicity releases about their selection to "major

newspapers" and also may request notice of their selection be sent to colleges or to prospective employers.

Lists of students' names and addresses are not released to any other agency or institution. The only organizations receiving names are those colleges or employers to whom the students request information be sent. Complimentary copies of the ECI publication are made available upon request to all libraries, colleges, and participating public and private schools. No report on the number furnished is available, but several public libraries in the northern suburbs of Chicago have received free copies of the 1974 edition.

Names of all scholarship winners since 1967 were published in a letter announcing scholarship competition for 1974-1975. Names and amounts of each scholarship for the past three years were furnished for the survey. All scholarships are paid directly to the college or university the student attends.[1]

The Better Business Bureau of Metropolitan Chicago has issued a favorable report describing the business of Educational Communications, Inc. The report says: "This company meets the Better Business Bureau's standards of business practices. To meet these standards Bureau files must show a satisfactory record which includes prompt reply and proper consideration to customer complaints on advertising and selling practices."

Who's Who is a growing business. The first book, published in 1967, contained 13,000 biographies. The 1968-1969 book listed 53,000 students. By 1972-1973 there were 150,000, and in the current eighth edition, there are 236,000. According to Paul Krouse, the number of students included hereafter will be controlled, that the annual edition has gone to press with between 235,000 and 240,000 students listed.

The Merit Publishing Company Scholarship Foundation, now Educational Communications Scholarship Foundation, has applied several times to be included in the NASSP Contests and Activities Committee's advisory list, but has never been listed. Scholarship programs were removed from the purview of the committee in 1973.

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[1]Educational Communications Scholarship Foundation has awarded over $75,000 in grants. Grants are based on ACT or SAT examination scores, need, and leadership qualifications. Twenty-nine students received awards of $500 or $1000 in the 1974-1975 school year. The $25,000 total in awards is funded by the publishing company.

Some Generalizations

FROM THE DATA received from the organizations themselves and from other sources, the following generalizations may be made:

Selection Procedures

Publishers of recognition books will include biographies of almost any student who submits personal data. Criteria for acceptance are often not very clearly stated or followed rigorously. In some cases, only the student's signature is required to verify the authenticity of the data-form. Although the companies solicit names from the schools, few school principals are cooperating, largely because of the commercial motive of the publishers who sell their product to the students. The recognition books, therefore, usually contain the names of many students who by most standards are quite average, with many outstanding school achievers omitted.

Cases of fictitious or fraudulent entries are common. One such case received national publicity in April 1975, when an Indiana coach invented a basketball hot-shot who was listed in a *High School All-Americans* publication. The coach had been invited to submit up to *four* of his players for the "All-American" publication.

Even the recognition books for professionals have questionable selection procedures. A Nebraska principal recently nominated his dog (Judy Craindox) for the *Outstanding Secondary Educators of America* and received a congratulatory acceptance letter. The nomination wasn't scrutinized very carefully. The nominator was "Ima Dog."

The "Track and Field Athletes of the Year," one of the *Coach and Athlete* magazine's recognition books, published the accomplishments of four bogus track stars recommended by a Yakima, Wash., sports editor. The "stars" were all newspaper staff members. The same issue contained two fictitious athletes submitted by a California track coach. The sports editor said his purpose was to attack what he considered an "obviously quite lucrative, quite possibly a million-dollar business that capitalizes on native American vanity and naivete." A Chicago newspaper reported the

response of the *Coach and Athlete* circulation director, "I don't know what they are trying to prove; we take their word for it."

The honor and recognition societies, all of them not-for-profit, have established chapters of their organizations and have been able to control selection procedures within each member school. The several societies have rather specific criteria for selection into their membership.

Costs of Recognition

None of the publishers of recognition books or the honor or recognition societies and clubs requires payment of any entry fees or membership charges in order to be selected. The recognition publications, however, do sell the books and other souvenir mementoes directly to the students and/or their families. The recognition societies, with chapters or clubs in the schools, may charge the students membership dues or expect students to purchase their membership pins. Purchases of award certificates and pins are made by the school. Individuals cannot purchase award insignia directly from the supplier (usually the national headquarters).

In all the award programs, there is a strong likelihood that if the student wishes to have pins, certificates, mementoes, or books, the student will bear the cost.

"Boards of Advisers" or "Contributing Editors"

Most recognition books have assembled a lengthy list of "contributing editors" or "advisers" for status purposes, including governors, mayors, entertainers, professional athletes, congressmen, businessmen, and a number of educators. These names appear on the letterheads of the company's stationery and are prominently used with pictures and congratulatory messages in the books themselves.

The Educational Products Information Exchange (EPIE) Institute reported that it contacted all the contributing editors for ECI's publication and concluded:

> The Contributing Editor list is simply a revolving door! It works like this: Prominent persons are contacted by the publisher and asked to write an essay (gratis) to help honor the outstanding young Americans featured in the forthcoming edition. Most of the dignitaries do write their essays—the first year. Frequently, disgruntled consumers then contact the contributors, asking why they lent their names to the project. The contributing editors ask to be removed from the list—but this

process takes time. Meanwhile the company recruits new contributors, using the list of past editors as proof of the company's respectability.[1]

EPIE also reported that it has copies of letters from senators, governors, athletes, and youth organization heads, all explaining that "disillusion with the project led them to demand that their names be deleted from the list of editors."

Research Value

The original Marquis *Who's Who in America* has established itself as a useful reference tool. Its primary selection criterion is "reference value." Virtually every public or school or university library of any consequence purchases *Who's Who* annually.

The same claim is made for the student who's who publications. *Outstanding Teenagers of America* on its title page claims that the biographical compilation is intended solely as a reference work and/or for scholarly pursuits. ECI's *Who's Who* is offered on a complimentary basis to all libraries and to participating schools. The reason given by the publishers is to provide students who can't afford the publication a place where they can see the book with their biographies listed.

Reference librarians in several north suburban Chicago libraries evaluated the books variously as follows: "I wouldn't say it is a legitimate reference tool." "It is of no value—strictly an ego trip." "I see no value as a research instrument." "No occasion to use it." Such testimony would lead to the conclusion that who's who publications for high school students have very little if any reference value for anyone. The *Nor'easter*, published by the North Suburban Library System, concluded in its April-May, 1975 issue that "this particular *Who's Who Among American High School Students* does not seem a worthy addition to either home or library collections."

Scholarship Programs

A number of the recognition programs have developed scholarship programs for their members (clubs and societies) or for their selected students (recognition books). These scholarship programs have been described in detail in the reviews of each program. In all cases, scholarship recipients are selected by a national committee or board appointed by the organization. Awards are funded by the companies from profits of their businesses.

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[1] *Epiegram*, the Educational Consumers Newsletter, March 15, 1975.

In relationship to the number of students eligible and being recognized in the program, some of the scholarship programs are too small to be considered very much of an incentive. For example, *The Society of Distinguished American High School Students* awarded four scholarships totalling $2,000. *Outstanding Teenagers* awarded two national winners $1,000 each and 10 regional winners $500 each. This amount would not be adequate for a single semester's tuition for one student in many colleges.

By contrast, the not-for-profit National Honor Society of NASSP gives annually 225 scholarships of $1,000 each.

The scholarship programs of the recognition book publishers are belated additions to the profitable enterprise of publishing student biographies and appear to be enhancing their business image and their profitability. Very few students are benefiting from the funds distributed.

Guidelines for Participation

THE PURPOSE OF this study and its findings were reported to all participating parties in order to be fair and objective and not to prejudge any program. Hopefully the facts will speak for themselves, and value judgments about any of the programs will be unnecessary. It is not the intention of this study to impugn the motives or to discredit any of the companies or organizers of these programs. It is quite apparent that some facts are hard to come by. Not all publishers of the recognition books are anxious to have their programs closely scrutinized by investigators in the field of education or by consumer protection groups. Some have been secretive, defensive, and less than honest, while others have been open and cooperative. Research of this type must necessarily depend upon the integrity of those reporting.

With these limitations in mind, the following guidelines are suggested to help protect students and schools from the abuses so common in the various recognition programs for high school students.

1. If the recognition is to have any validity, it must be under the control of the school. Students should not be selected by chance, nor should students be solicited for selection; neither should they be able to nominate themselves. Selection criteria should be clearly defined, and if the program is national in scope, they should be closely limited. (How many all-Americans can there be in Gladden Corner High School?[1]) Recognition programs that just collect names by the thousands to include in a book which the publisher hopes to sell to the selectees are suspect. They cannot claim to have collected all the deserving students and are likely to include many who are undeserving by anyone's standards.
2. Schools must protect the confidentiality of student information. Under no circumstance should a school provide the student's name, let alone personal data, to a publisher or an

[1]The fictitious school invented by the Indiana coach for his Indiana basketball hot-shot.

organization, even for purposes of recognition, without having that student's or parents' permission. If schools are to make recommendations for any of these programs, permission of students must be obtained, or the data forms must be given to students so that they provide the information themselves. Under no circumstances should the recognition volumes include the addresses of students or their parents.

3. Every avenue available should be explored to learn what use a publisher or recognition society is making of the student information even though it is not published. If students furnish parent and grandparent names and addresses, what use is to be made of the data? This may be extremely difficult to ascertain except for the assurances of the publishers themselves. If any school cooperating with a recognition publisher or society learns of improper use of data provided by the student or school, it should be reported to organizations such as NASSP or the Better Business Bureau so that others may be warned.
4. There should be no cost required for the student to receive the recognition. If the school selects students or nominates them for a society or for inclusion in a recognition book, there should be clear understanding of what optional costs there might be, what certificates, pins, mementoes, or books will be offered for sale, and who will bear the cost, if purchased. Schools that sponsor chapters of the various honor societies should find means to eliminate any cost of the recognition for the student as is the case with the National Honor Society of NASSP.
5. If schools are considering submitting names for who's who publications, they should insist on the right to examine a copy of the book to determine the exact nature of the publication, the quality of its printing and binding, the format of the biographical listings, and the information to be included. The book should be examined to be sure that one does exist. The student can also decide whether the recognition is worth the bother, let alone the cost. If there are certificates, plaques, or other mementoes, students should be able to see in advance what they are purchasing.
6. Sponsors, backers, or owners should be clearly identified. The motive of the sponsor should be examined carefully. All of the programs studied in this survey would appear to have

altruistic motives, namely, "to reward and recognize deserving youth." Whether the organization is in business for profit or not should be known.

7. If the program claims national recognition, participants should be told specifically how this recognition is achieved—aside from the publication of a book whose circulation is almost entirely among those who are listed in it. Who uses the book? Does anyone besides the biographee ever purchase it? Ask specifically where the book is circulated and how many. Visit your local library and ask the reference librarian about it. If the librarian has never heard of the book, it probably has little value as a recognition, let alone a reference book.

   The fact that publishers say that a Library of Congress number has been assigned means nothing. Anyone can get such a number, even for a book that may never be published.

8. If there are scholarship offers associated with the recognition, the basis for competition should be clearly spelled out. Are the number of awards and the amounts given sufficient to warrant claim of a national competition where students actually have a fair chance to win? Are lists of previous scholarship winners available? Who selects the recipients? Who provides the funds? Most responsible scholarship programs make their awards directly to the schools the winners attend. Scholarships should not be paid directly to the recipients.

9. View the lists of editors or advisers of the profit-motivated companies with some reservations as to their involvement or endorsement of what the company does. Most of them named are well meaning and lend their names readily to anything they interpret as a good youth-serving cause.

10. The final guideline may be best expressed in the concluding words of EPIE's investigation of *Who's Who Among American High School Students*: "If young people and their parents are aware of all these facts, and are willing to spend the money anyway for the pleasure of seeing their name in print, and of displaying the book—that is their own, *informed* decision."

Conclusion

THE RESPONSIBILITY of educators is to make certain that their students are alerted to the exact nature of the recognition programs and the possible cost of participation so that they can decide if they want to participate or not. Educators should not be too surprised that the mystique of a "who's who" nomination for many students and their parents (and grandparents) will be an ego trip they can't resist.

About the Author

Gilbert R. Weldy is principal of the Niles North High School in Skokie, Illinois. He was a member of NASSP's Committee on National Contests and Activities from 1970 to 1974.